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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 6452
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SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST MULTILATERAL WORKING GROUP ON WATER
RESOURCES: EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING OF THE
MIDDLE EAST DESALINATION RESEARCH CENTER,
JULY 11, 2007

¶1. (U) This cable is Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

Summary and Introduction

¶2. (U) The Executive Council (ExCouns) of the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) held its twentieth meeting in Salalah, Oman, July 11, 2007. MEDRC, which was established by the Middle East peace process Multilateral Working Group on Water Resources, has its headquarters in Muscat, Oman, and has been operating continuously since early ¶1997. Representatives of the U.S., Israel, Oman, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, and Qatar (which joined with this meeting) constitute MEDRC's Executive Council. MEDRC's activities are open to experts and officials from throughout the Middle East and other parts of the world.

¶3. (U) In their opening remarks, both ExCouns Chairman Sayyid Badr and MEDRC Director Quteishat expressed great pleasure in welcoming the Government of Qatar to the Council as MEDRC's newest member. The ExCouns reviewed the status of ongoing activities, fundraising activities, and MEDRC finances. Quteishat reported that discussions with several potential new member governments continue. End Summary and Introduction.

Participants

¶4. (U) The following officials participated in the December 12 ExCouns meeting: for Oman, Amb. Sayyid Badr, ExCouns Chairman and Omani MFA Under Secretary, and Mr. Humaid Al-Maani, Omani MFA; for the U.S., Dr. Charles Lawson, ExCouns Vice Chairman and NEA Senior Advisor for Science and Technology; for Israel, Mr. Yaacov Keidar, Multilateral Coordinator, Israeli MFA, Mr. Daniel Nevo, Israeli MFA (and Keidar's successor), and Dr. Uri Shani, Israeli Technical Representative and Director of the Israel National Water and Sewage Authority; for Japan, Mr. Hideo Sato, Director, First

Middle East Division, Japanese MFA; for Korea, Mr. Sang-Wook Kim, Korean MFA; Mr. Jung-Soo Kim, Korean Embassy Muscat; for Jordan, Mr. Fayez Bataineh, Assistant Secretary General, Jordan Valley Authority; for The Netherlands, Baroness Henriette van Lynden, Director, North Africa and Middle East Department, Dutch MFA; and, for Qatar, Mr. Fahad Hamad Al Mohannadi, General Manager, Qatar Electricity and Water Company. Palestinian Water Authority Director Fadel Ka'awash could not attend the meeting due to a scheduling conflict. MEDRC Director Koussai Quteishat also participated in the meeting.

Qatar Welcomed to MEDRC

¶5. (U) At the opening of the meeting, ExCouns Chairman Sayyid Badr and MEDRC Director Quteishat recognized the Qatari ExCouns representative and welcomed the Government of Qatar as the newest MEDRC member (Note: Qatar expressed interest in joining MEDRC in 2006 and finalized all arrangements, including depositing its \$3 million contribution in the MEDRC account, shortly before the July meeting. End note.) Both also noted that MEDRC needed to continue to expand membership in order to ensure its sustainability.

Status of Ongoing Activities

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¶6. (U) Since the December 2006 ExCouns meeting, MEDRC issued its 2007 Request for Proposals for research projects and has so far received five pre-proposals. The total number of MEDRC projects awarded since MEDRC began operations now stands at 61, 33 of which have been completed. MEDRC's scholarship program continues to expand, with each of the five new projects that started in 2006 including a Masters or Ph.D. student. To date, MEDRC has supported 10 Masters and 15 Ph.D. students. Demand for MEDRC sponsored training courses also continues to increase. Since the December 2006 ExCouns meeting, MEDRC sponsored five training courses, one each in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Jordan and Oman. Since the training program began in September 2003, MEDRC has organized 29 training courses, with 994 experts from the region having participated. Quteishat noted that the training course in Libya, which took place in February 2007, and was co-sponsored by the Libyan Petroleum Institute, was the first MEDRC activity to take place in Libya.

¶7. (U) Quteishat reported that MEDRC has developed the curriculum for an MSC program in desalination in Tunisia and helped the Water Research Center at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman develop MSc and PhD programs in desalination. Quteishat also reported that construction of MEDRC's in-house research facility continues apace, with completion scheduled by the end of 2007.

Fundraising

¶8. (SBU) Quteishat reported that MEDRC continues to pursue additional governments to join (and contribute to) MEDRC. With Qatar now a member, Quteishat noted that MEDRC would renew discussions with the UAE. (Note: During initial discussions about a year and a half ago, UAE MFA Under Secretary Sheikh Abdul Rashid Alnuaimi expressed interest in

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UAE joining MEDRC. However, ExCouns Chairman Sayyid Badr decided to wait until Qatari membership was finalized before following up with the UAE. End note.) Discussions also continue at various stages with Italy, Germany, Spain, the UK, and Australia. Quteishat said he believes Germany is close to agreeing to join.

Financial Update

¶9. (SBU) In reviewing MEDRC's financial situation, Quteishat emphasized that MEDRC's financial situation remains serious. Even with Qatar now having contributed \$3 million, Quteishat urged other members to make additional contributions to help ensure MEDRC's future. Oman, the U.S., the Netherlands, and Korea agreed to make additional contributions before the end of the year. Japan and Israel noted that they would have to look into the possibility.

Comments

¶10. (SBU) Qatar joining MEDRC represents a breakthrough, in that it is the first Gulf country to join since Oman signed on as a founding member in 1996. Qatar's contribution to MEDRC, along with contributions from some current ExCouns member governments in 2007, will help ease MEDRC's financial crunch in the short term. For the longer term, however, a steady stream of new contributions - either from existing members or from new members joining - will be needed to assure MEDRC's sustained existence.

¶11. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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